Joint Effort to Ensure Air Quality in Schools

Department of Education and Culture (to July 99)
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School boards are using new tools, providing more training and working closely with the provincial government, in a joint effort to ensure good indoor air quality in schools.

A new environmental health and safety officer - contracted by the province - is now in place to work with school boards and schools on air quality issues. As well, thanks to a $50,000 investment by the province, school boards now have the latest indoor air quality monitoring equipment.

Gerald Muise, most recently with the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board, brings 25 years of experience in occupational health and safety to this position. Beginning Nov. 2, his responsibilities - in partnership with school boards - include working on preventative measures to maintain good air quality, investigating air quality concerns, and communicating with parents, teachers and others in the school.

Education and Culture Minister Robbie Harrison says prevention - through good planning and practices - is key. "All of our school boards now have occupational health and safety staff and committees in place," he said. "Mr. Muise is eager to begin working with these individuals as part of a team effort to keep our schools healthy and safe."

The province has also purchased five "indoor air quality detective monitors", now being shared among school boards. The monitors, developed in Nova Scotia for the world market, are capable of detecting ultra fine particles in the air that aren't normally detectable by sight or smell.

Frank Barteaux, executive director of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, says school board staff are putting the monitors to good use. "Staff received two days of training, and will use the equipment - again, with a focus on prevention," Mr. Barteaux said. "As one example, if a new boiler is installed, the monitor will show any contaminants in the air very quickly. At any time, if an air quality problem is suspected, the monitor quickly pinpoints the source."

Along with meetings between school boards and government departments, the air quality team consults groups such as CASLE - Citizens for a Safe Learning Environment. In recent years, CASLE has provided ongoing information and input into the general upgrading of environmental health and safety in our province's schools.

"More work needs to be done, and we'll still have air quality issues," Mr. Harrison said. "The difference is, we now have people and partnerships in place to keep the focus on prevention. As well, we can get to work quickly if and when issues emerge."

Although the main focus of this initiative is prevention, $2.5 million in funding assistance is available to school boards when unexpected air quality concerns occur in schools.

NOTE: The following is intended for use by broadcast media.

The province and regional school boards are teaming up to make sure the air in our schools is healthy to breathe.

Beginning today, a new environmental health and safety officer will work with the school boards and schools to maintain good air quality and investigate any concerns. Gerald Muise, most recently with the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board, brings 25 years of experience in occupational health and safety to this position.

The province is also investing $50,000 to ensure school boards now have the latest indoor air quality monitoring equipment.

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